



A STRATEGIC FORESIGHT TOOLKIT

Introduction

Duration: 2.5–3 hours.

Materials: Pens and Scratch Paper. 1 4-sided die, 1 20-sided die. If die are not available, an online number generator can be used. It is not mandatory, but if this is done as a group, flipcharts and dot stickers are recommended.

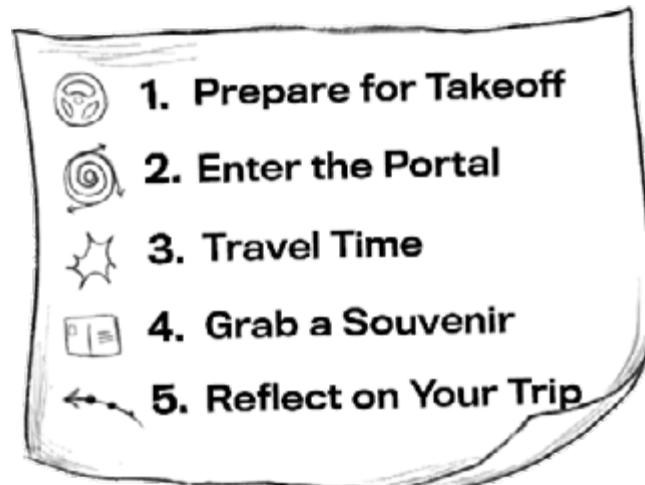
There's something quite inconvenient about the future, and that is the fact that it doesn't exist. We can only ever be in the present. As a result, the future is just a symbol for the repercussions of our daily actions. The choices we're making right now are playing an active role in determining what happens next. While you can't predict the future, there are a few things that you can do to invent it.

- 1. Track Trends.** Keep track of the trends and emerging issues that interest you. Every day, week, or month, contribute to a log in which you capture these new points of influence, or signals of change to come. Keep your eye on those things as they evolve, and always ask yourself: how might this impact my project or organization?
- 2. Think Plural.** The futurist Jim Dator created the Alternative Futures Method to remind us that there are many possible futures. When considering the future of your project or organization, picture the positive AND negative possibilities. Don't get blindsided by the future!
- 3. Walk Backwards.** Once you have defined a vision for the future direction of your project or organization, create a timeline that takes you backwards from that desired state to today. This is a method known as *backcasting*, and can help make those long-term goals more actionable and tangible.

We created the TIME MACHINE toolkit to help you do just these things. Our mission is to make strategic foresight more accessible and fun for organizations and individuals. In doing so, we aim to make futures-thinking a part of your day-to-day life and work. Our methodology includes five key phases:

To prepare for takeoff, you'll have a short safety briefing, and then take part in a written reflection exercise.

Next, you'll enter the portal by exploring the context of your project or organization, as well as the trends and emerging issues that are relevant for you. Then, you'll travel through time by creating a series of written scenarios about the future of your project or organization. Finally, you'll grab a quick souvenir before taking a bit of time to reflect on your trip.



WORKSHOP STEP 01:

Prepare For Takeoff.

Safety Briefing

NOTES: In order to prepare for takeoff, please read the Safety Briefing below. If you are doing this as a group, the lead facilitator will be responsible for reading the Safety Briefing.

Welcome to the TIME MACHINE. Shortly, we'll begin our journey to 10 years from now. Unless otherwise instructed, please stay seated throughout the journey. At all times, please remember the future is impossible to predict. Unless otherwise instructed, please stay seated throughout the journey, and keep your hands and feet inside the TIME MACHINE. Thank you for listening. We will be taking off shortly.

NOTES: If you are doing this as a group, the lead facilitator can approach one of the participants at random, and read the following:

"Excuse me, I need to inform you that you are seated in an emergency row. Are you willing and able to assist in the event of an emergency? Thank you."

Approaching the Portal

As you approach the Portal, please take the time to reflect on the journey ahead of you.

- What would the world look like today, if we ("we" as in your project or organization) never existed?
- What would the world look like in 10 years, if we ceased operations today?

NOTES: If this is being done individually, take 3-5 minutes to work through each question on some scratch paper. If this is done as a group, the facilitator should give each participant 2-3 minutes to reflect on each question individually before doing a report out in which participants share their reflections with the larger group or small team.



WORKSHOP STEP 02:

Enter the Portal.

The Futures Vortex

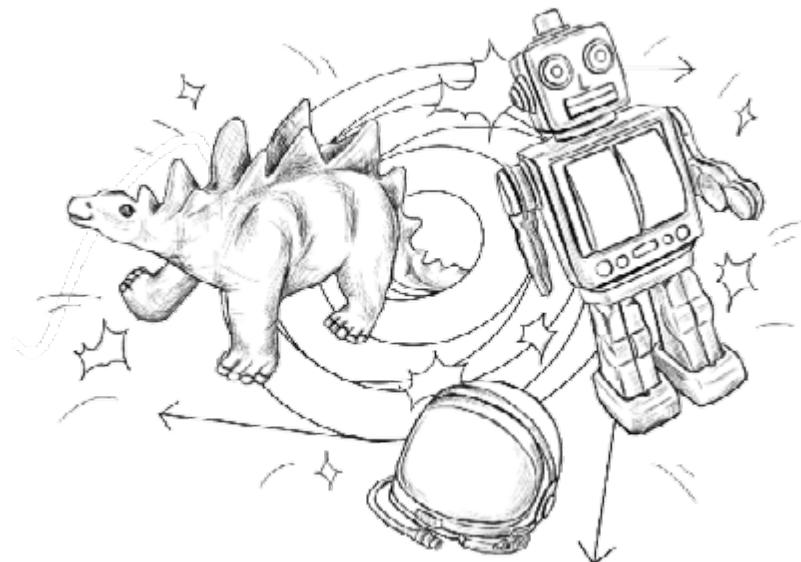
NOTES: In order to prepare for the next activity, please read the following.

The future doesn't exist. Because we can only ever be in the present, the future is just a symbol for the repercussions of our daily actions. We are all critical participants in creating the future we want to inhabit. When thinking about the future, we must also consider the significance of our current and past actions. The futures vortex, designed by Jacques Barcia, and inspired by Sohail Inayatullah's Futures Triangle, allows us to uncover the context we are working within. Please complete the Futures Vortex for your organization or project.

NOTES: If this is being done individually, take a maximum of 5 minutes to work through each step of the Futures Vortex using the worksheet on the following page. It is recommended to have the Futures Vortex printed as a worksheet for you to work through. If this is done as a group, the facilitator should break the room into small teams. Each small team should include a minimum of 2 people, and a maximum of 5. It is recommended to have the Futures Vortex drawn on a flipchart or whiteboard so that teams can work through the activity collaboratively, but participants can use scratch paper as well.

- **Past:** What is the legacy of the past you are building upon?
- **Present:** What current trends or shifts in the market are impacting you in the present?
- **Future:** What vision of the future does your project or organization currently portray? What are some emerging issues (emerging tech, signals of change, etc.) that could get in the way of realizing your project, or growing your organization's success?

NOTES: If this is done as a group, the facilitator can have each small team can share the top 1-3 key insights from each of the three discussion topics: past, present, and future.



PAST

What is the legacy of the past you are building upon?

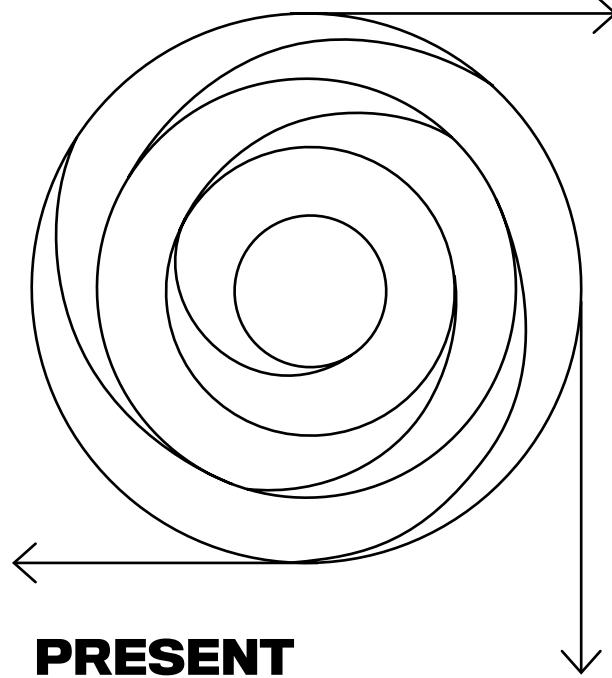
FUTURE

What vision of the future does your project or organization currently portray?

What are some emerging issues that could get in the way of realizing your project?

PRESENT

What current trends or shifts in the market are impacting you in the present?



Trends and Emerging Issues

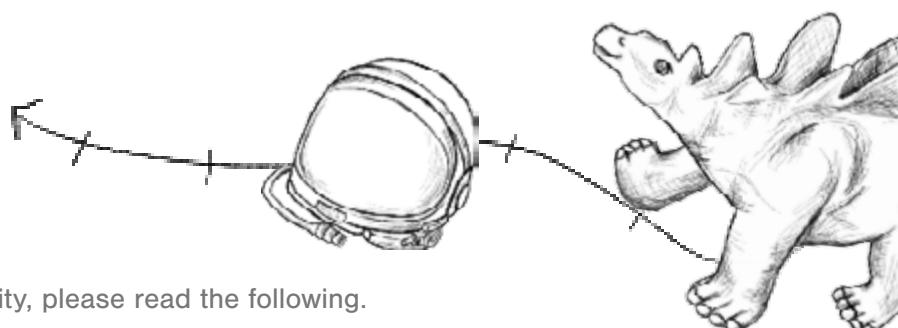
NOTES: In order to prepare for the next activity, please read the following.

Informed by your work in the Futures Vortex, generate a list of 20 trends and/or emerging issues that are most relevant to the context of your project or organization (for example, “Artificial Intelligence” or “Working from Home”).

NOTES: If this is done as a group, the facilitator can have each small team work to generate a list of their own, or the entire group can work together to determine a single list of 20 trends and/or emerging issues that everyone in the room will use moving forward. If small teams are having a difficult time selecting the top 20 trends and/or emerging issues, the facilitator may choose to bring dot stickers to hand out for voting purposes. If time allows, participants can perform stakeholder interviews and additional desk research to further uncover the context of their work.

WORKSHOP STEP 03:

Travel Time.



NOTES: In order to prepare for the next activity, please read the following.

“Now that we’ve entered the portal, we’re ready to travel time. The TIME MACHINE has been calibrated to 10 years from today. We will be making two stops on this journey. First, we’ll explore the future of our industry or sector, and second, we’ll explore the future of our own project or organization.”

Stop 01: The Futures of Your Industry or Sector

NOTES: Please continue reading below.

“You will be going through three rounds of ideation in order to develop three unique scenarios for the futures of our sector or industry. As you work to develop these three scenarios, please attempt to detach yourself from the narrative as much as possible. Our second stop, coming right after these three rounds of ideation, will allow plenty of time for imagining our role within these futures. Your scenarios can be written in any style you’d like. We recommend keeping each scenario to no more than 100 words.”

NOTES: If this is done as a group, the facilitator should recommend that participants remain in the small teams they formed during the previous activity. We advise providing participants with no more than 15 minutes for each round of ideation. Please continue reading, below.

“Remember the 20 trends and/or emerging issues that were generated earlier? Be sure to have those handy. If you haven’t already, number your list from 1-20. This will make the next part of the exercise a lot easier. Ready? Here we go.”

ROUND 01:

The group facilitator or individual player rolls a 4-sided die (or other means of random selection) to determine the type of future the scenario exists within (based on Jim Dator's alternative futures):

- 1. Growth:** A future in which our current work or way of life continues to increase. Growth is the standard future vision for many companies (the chart with the arrows pointing up!), but growth is not always a positive thing (for example, growth of plastic waste).
- 2. Collapse:** A future in which growth is reversed due to a harsh economic environment, tragic event, or change in consumer mindset.
- 3. Constraint:** A future in which innovation and growth is intentionally constrained. For example, China's former one child policy.
- 4. Transformation:** A future in which our systems or ways of life are fundamentally changed. For example, moving from an agricultural society to an industrial one. The launch of the iPhone changing "overnight" the ways in which we communicate with each other.

Next, each small team or individual player will roll a 20-sided die (or other means of random selection) one time to determine trend/emerging issue that they will be working with from the list they created earlier. Before the time runs out on the first round of ideation, players must develop a future scenario using the following template:

- What is your vision for the future?
- What stakeholders are involved in this vision, and in what way are they involved?
- What is the impact on the industry?

Throughout the scenario writing process, players should be sure to keep the trend/emerging issue in mind, and align their narrative with the future archetype you've been dealt (growth, collapse, constraint, or transformation).

ROUND 02:

Facilitator rolls 4-sided die again. This time, each small team, or the individual player, rolls a 20-sided die two times to determine trends/emerging issues they'll be working with. Players develop a new future scenario. This future scenario shouldn't reference the one developed in the previous round.

ROUND 03:

Facilitator rolls 4-sided die a third time. This time, each small team, or the individual player, rolls a 20-sided die three times to determine the trends/emerging issues they'll be working with. Players develop a new future scenario. This future scenario shouldn't reference the one developed in the previous round.

NOTES: After the third round is complete, read the following.

"Take a few minutes to select one of the three future scenarios that you have ideated throughout the last three rounds of ideation to move forward into the next activity."

NOTES: If this is done as a group, the facilitator can have each small team share a high-level overview of the scenario they have selected to move forward into the next activity.

Stop 02: The Futures of Your Organization or Project

NOTES: In order to prepare for the next activity, please read the following.

“Now that you’ve selected a scenario, imagine the implications of that future on your own work.”

Consider the following as you reflect:

- What opportunities and challenges do these futures impose on us?
- What is a vision for a new program, initiative, or direction to pursue?
- What stakeholders are involved in this vision, and in what way are they involved?
- What is the impact on the business?
- What is the impact on the industry?

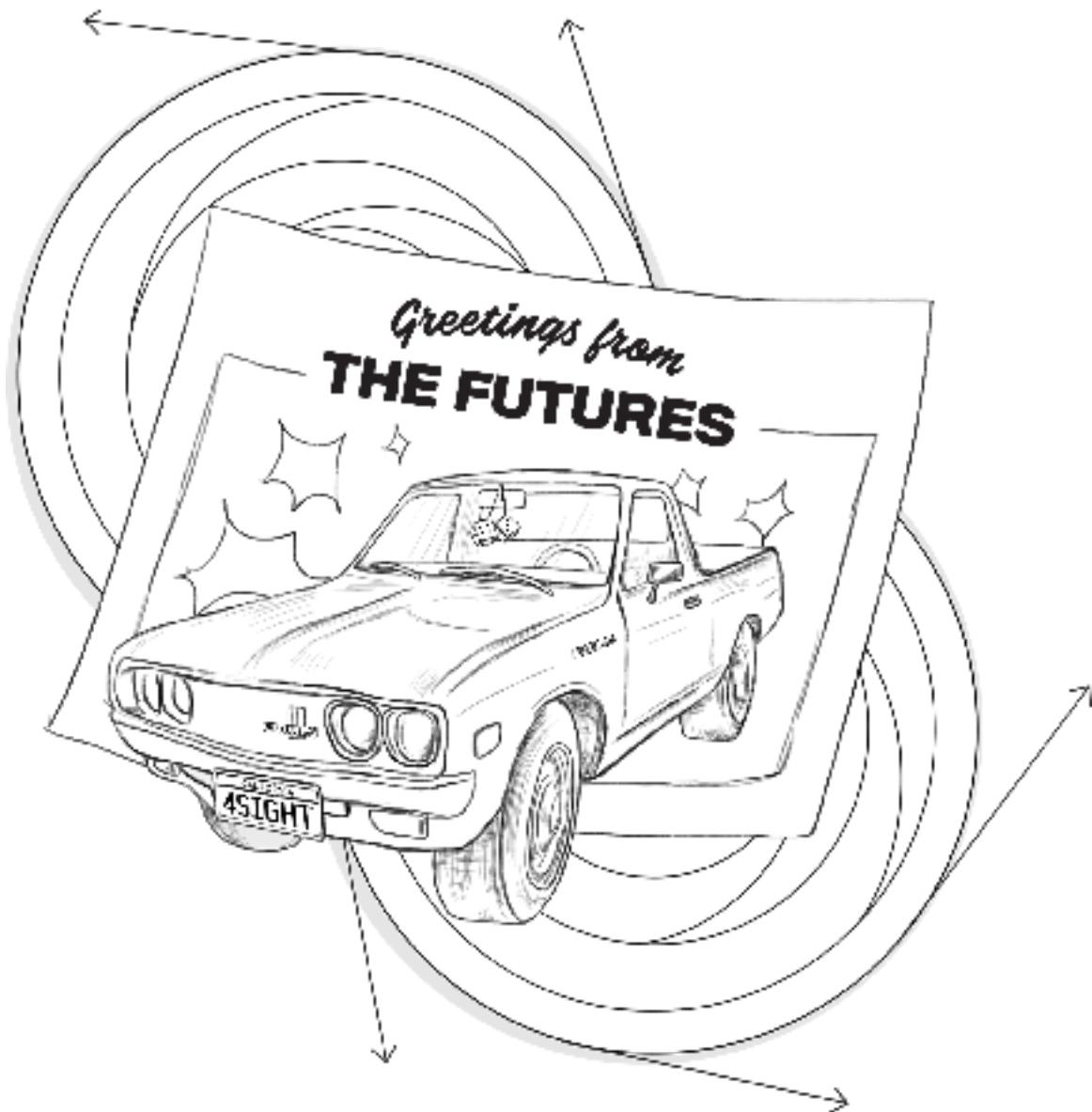
WORKSHOP STEP 04:

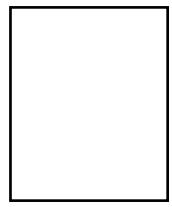
Grab a Souvenir.

NOTES: In order to prepare for the next activity, please read the following.

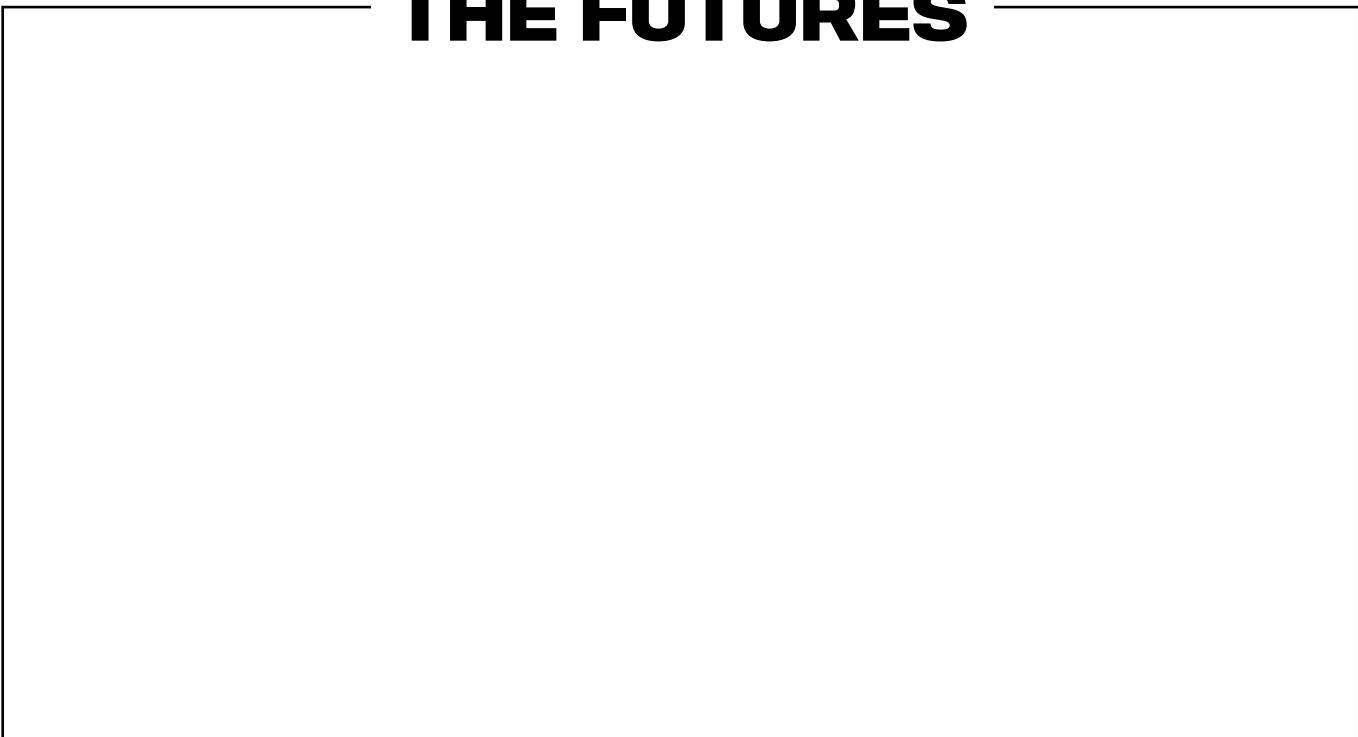
"A great trip is never complete without a souvenir! Use the postcard template to draw an image of the scenario and implications that you've imagined, and write yourself a brief greeting from 10 years in the future."

NOTES: If this is done as a group, it is recommended that the facilitator have each individual design the postcard using colored pencils, crayons, or markers. In addition, once everyone has completed their postcard, it is recommended to have the participants "send" their postcards to one another. This is accomplished by inviting everyone to gift their postcard to someone else in the room.





Greetings from
THE FUTURES



WORKSHOP STEP 05:

Reflect on Your Trip.

NOTES: In order to prepare for the next activity, please read the following.

“By now, you’ve imagined a range of scenarios for the future of your industry or sector, and proceeded to imagine the implications of one of those scenarios on your own work. Now, it’s time to backcast. This two-part activity will help you make the long-term goals and visions more actionable and tangible. We’ll start by picturing success, and end by creating a high-level timeline that captures the next 10 years.”

Picture Success

NOTES: Please continue reading below.

“It’s 10 years into the future, and the scenario you’ve imagined has worked out well for you and your organization or project. Write a newspaper headline that represents the success of your organization or project.”

NOTES: If you are doing this individually, spend no more than five minutes producing your newspaper headline. If this is done as a group, it is recommended that the facilitator budget 20 minutes for the exercise. The activity should start with each individual participant writing a newspaper headline on their own for five minutes. Next, each individual will share their newspaper headline with their small team. Finally, each team will select one headline to move forward with, or create a new headline that captures elements from each.

Backcasting

NOTES: Please continue reading below.

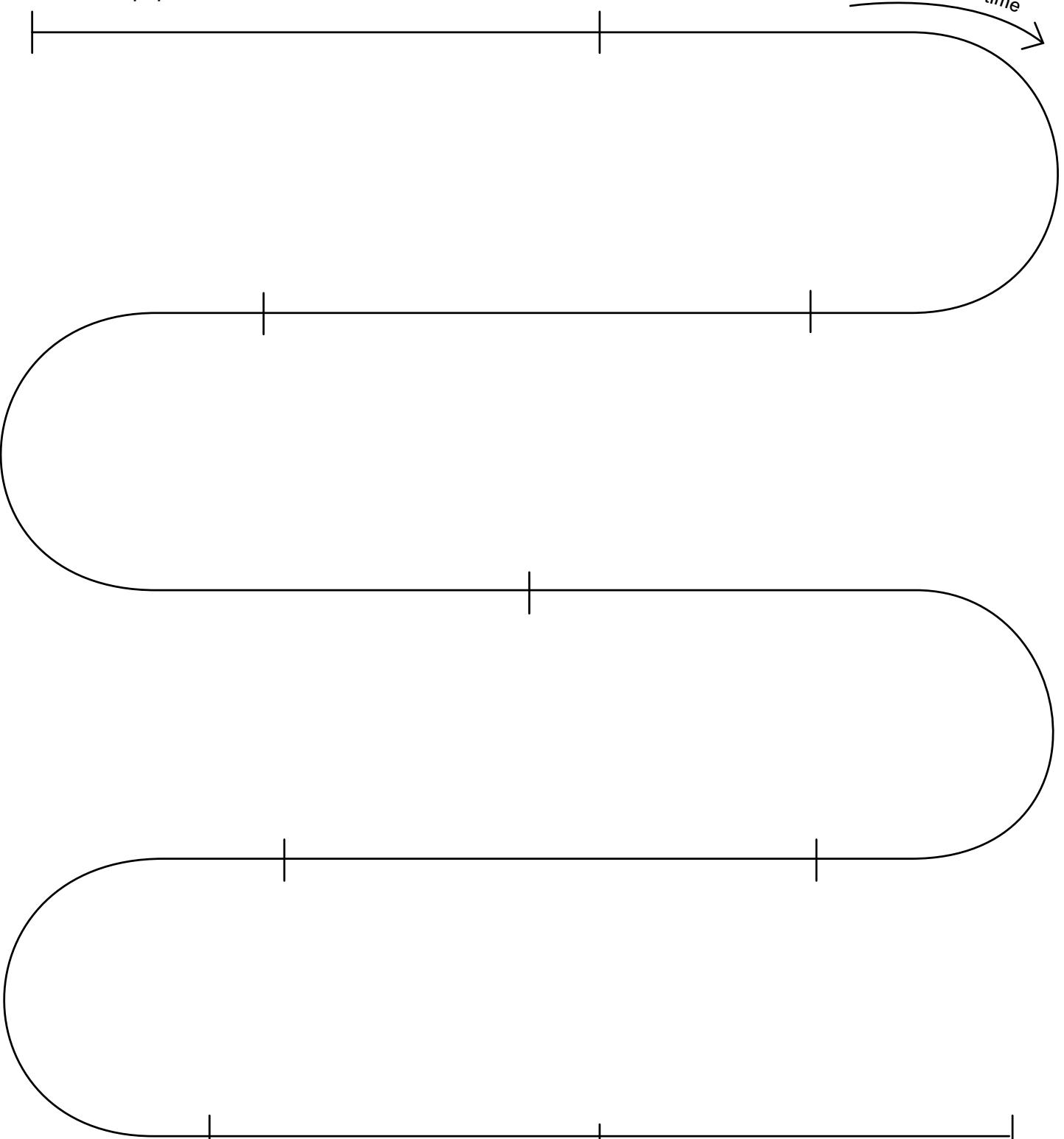
“Now that you’ve pictured success, create a visual timeline that will lead us from today to 10 years in the future. To head back to the present, we will need to put our TIME MACHINE in reverse! So, create a timeline that starts at the desired future state and brings it back home to the present day. Your timeline must include 10 milestones, including the final milestone, which will feature the newspaper headline that you wrote in the previous exercise.”

NOTES: If this is done as a group, once everyone has completed their timelines, it is recommended to have the participants share their timelines with the full group. A fun way to do this is to imagine that one side of the room is the present, and the other is 10 years in the future. With this in mind, participants can share their timelines as they walk across the room. To conclude, read the following.

“Congratulations! You’ve just traveled time, and now we’re back in the present. Be sure to take the lessons you’ve learned from the future, and begin applying them today. Remember, the future is just a symbol for the implications of what we are doing right now. Start realizing those futures, today.”

FUTURE

Your newspaper headline



PRESENT

CREDITS

This toolkit was created by verynice, a design strategy practice that develops, facilitates, and publishes methods for creative problem solving. As this is our first edition of the toolkit, we intend on making adjustments here and there to work out all of the kinks. If you have any ideas to improve the experience, or would like to invite our team to facilitate the TIME MACHINE workshop for your organization, please do not hesitate to reach out to info@verynice.co. Thank you!

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